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STATE FOR EAP/MTS
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SECDEF/OSD.ISA/AP TOOLAN/REDMAN
JOINT STAFF J5 (WILKES/ROBINSON/COLEMAN)

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TAGS: [PTER](#) [MOPS](#) [PINS](#) [RP](#)

SUBJECT: JOINT COMMITTEE IDENTIFIES FIVE PERPETRATORS OF
BEHEADINGS; GOVERNMENT DELAYS PUNITIVE ACTION

REF: A. MANILA 2503

- [1](#)B. MANILA 2474
- [1](#)C. MANILA 2428
- [1](#)D. MANILA 2369
- [1](#)E. MANILA 2358
- [1](#)F. MANILA 2344

Classified By: Ambassador Kristie Kenney for
reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. The Philippine government has adopted a more measured approach to bring to justice the perpetrators of the beheadings of ten Philippine Marines in Tipo Tipo, Basilan. Philippine officials hope that the visible deployment of troops -- rather than use of force -- will be sufficient to convince local leaders to turn over five identified perpetrators of the beheadings without punitive operations against Muslim insurgents. Ambassador and DCM have reached out to both sides, urging them to seek a judicial course of action to avert a military confrontation that would result in bloodshed and undermine the peace process. It is unclear whether the effort will work, as some elements within the government and military appear to be pressing for a punitive operation. President Arroyo has delayed military operations until at least August 3 to allow the investigation -- as well as the ASEAN Regional Forum meetings in Manila -- to continue. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) During a July 27 command conference at the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) Western Mindanao Command Headquarters in Zamboanga City, President Arroyo delayed until July 31 punitive action against the perpetrators of the beheadings of ten Philippine Marines in Tipo Tipo, Basilan. Arroyo granted the three-day reprieve to allow the Joint Committee composed of government and Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) members to complete their investigation of the July 10 incident. However, on July 31, the government announced a further three-day extension (until August 3) to enable the Joint Committee to complete its fact-finding mission. According to Presidential Advisor on the Peace Process Jesus Dureza, the Joint Committee has identified five suspects in the beheadings. We are currently hearing that the military operations will not commence until August 3, at the conclusion of the ASEAN Regional Forum meetings.

[1](#)3. (C) Ambassador and DCM urged Dureza on July 30 to preserve the peace process when bringing the perpetrators of the beheadings to justice. Dureza said he was working very closely with Basilan Congressman Wahab Akbar and local mayors

to affect the turn over of the four perpetrators identified by the Joint Committee. Such an action, according to Dureza, could appease the Philippine Marines, and avert military operations against over 130 individuals who were charged by the Philippine National Police (PNP) with frustrated murder for their alleged role in the July 10 ambush. Arrest warrants for the PNP's suspects were issued July 26 by Basilan Regional Trial Court Judge Leo Jay T. Principe.

¶4. (C) DCM pressed MILF Vice-Chairman for Political Affairs Ghazali Jafaar to render MILF assistance in bringing those responsible for the beheadings to justice. Jafaar acknowledged the urgency of apprehending the perpetrators while expressing his support for the Joint Committee's investigation and the preservation of the peace process.

¶5. (C) Senior government security officials, including National Security Advisor Norberto Gonzales and AFP Chief of Staff General Hermogenes Esperon, are stressing legal processes "to avoid unnecessary action and reaction." Esperon said during a news conference that "until such time that the results of the investigation come in, there should be no punitive action."

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KENNEY